

State of Connecticut To Legalize Medical Marijuana

Dr. J. Craig Allen, Chief Medical Officer addresses Rushford's position on the state's approval of legislation that will legalize medical marijuana.

The state of Connecticut has recently passed a law legalizing the use of "medical marijuana," which will go into effect in October of this year. The details surrounding what medical diagnosis will be eligible and where and how the cannabis will be distributed still need to be clarified; however, as an institution dedicated to helping people and families suffering from addictions, it is important to address where we stand on this issue.

With regards to clients coming to us for treatment who have been authorized by a community physician to receive cannabis, their circumstances will be reviewed by our medical personnel. Rushford seeks to provide evidence-based, medically sound treatments for our clients' substance abuse, mental health and physical issues, and it is our responsibility to promote a safe and supportive sober environment for treatment.

Below are several facts and figures about marijuana use, both medical and recreational, which should be taken into consideration when examining this recently approved legislation.

Facts about marijuana:

- Medical marijuana is not approved by the FDA, is not a standardized or purified product that has obtained scientific approval and is not available in pharmacies through prescriptions.
- When marijuana is used for either medical or recreational purposes it is estimated that 9% of marijuana users will become dependent, and the number of addicted individuals will likely rise as more use it.
- Marijuana is the most widely abused illegal drug in the United States and in the World. At present, 61% of Americans ages 12 and older who meet diagnostic criteria for substance abuse or dependence for any drug (other than alcohol) do so because of their marijuana use.
- Cessation of marijuana use has been shown to produce a physical withdrawal syndrome with relapse rate after treatment as high as 71%.
- Marijuana use can lead to aggravation of symptoms of schizophrenia, relapse of stable schizophrenia and earlier onset of schizophrenia in vulnerable males. These side effects are more likely to occur with higher marijuana potency and earlier onset of marijuana use.
- Serious side effects related to marijuana use include short-term memory deficits; decreased concentration, attention, and information processing; and more drugged driving with the potential for more traffic accidents.

What will the effect of legalization of medical marijuana be on teenage marijuana use?

The Monitoring the Future survey, a nationwide study conducted by the University of Michigan since 1975, found that the rate of marijuana use in youths is inversely related to "perceived risk" and "perceived social disapproval". The proliferation of medical marijuana and legalization efforts across the country can be expected to decrease the perceptions of both risk and social disapproval of marijuana use in youths. In 2011, daily 12th-grade marijuana use was at the highest level in 30 years and it is expected to increase given the reasons cited.

More specific information and references can be found in the June 2012 issue of the American Journal of Psychiatry (*Am J Psychiatry 169:6, June 2012*) or online at ajp.psychiatryonline.org (*Commentary: Physicians and Medical Marijuana*)